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REVISED; SPRING, 1994

THE NATURE OF IMPRISONMENT IN THE U.S.:

IN BLACK AND WHITE

Walkin' **Steel**

A Production of the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown
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- **A Black man is 7 times more likely to go to prison than a white man.**
- **A Black woman is 8 times more likely to go to prison than a white woman.**
- **One out of two Black men will be arrested in his lifetime.**
- **One out of four Black men will go to prison in his lifetime.**
- **The incarceration rate for Black people in the U.S. is 5 times the incarceration rate for Black people in South Africa.**
- **Black people are 4 times as likely as white people to be arrested on drug charges–even though the two groups use drugs at almost the same rate.**
- **It costs more to send a person to prison for a year than to Harvard University for a year.**

The federal government and local governments have spent literally hundreds of billions of dollars on prisons, and yet virtually every expert who has examined the situation has found that imprisonment does nothing to change the situation, nothing to alter the amount of crime. Furthermore, as more and more prison cells are built, money runs out for schools, housing, health care, food stamps, employment programs, and for other basic human needs.

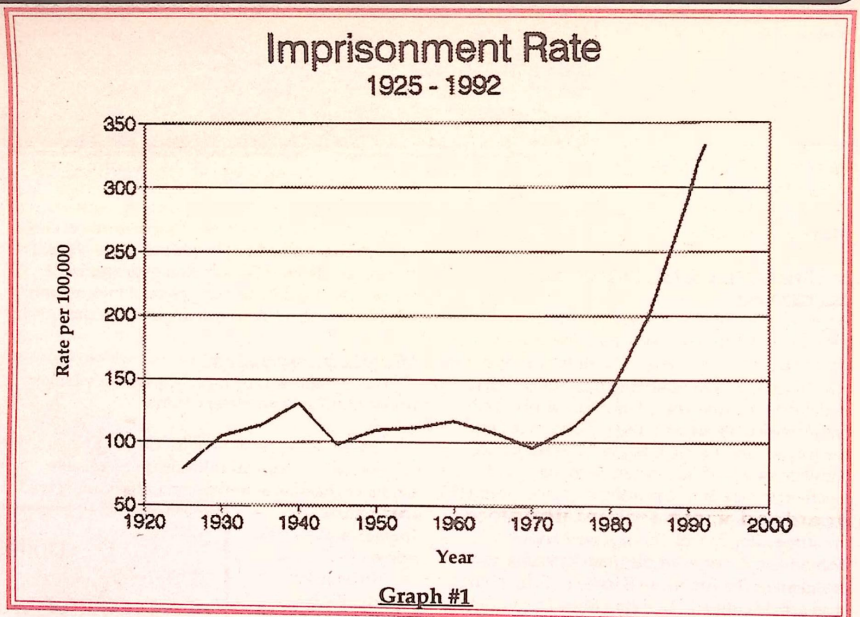
Not only are record numbers of people behind bars, but conditions of imprisonment are becoming more brutal. The ultimate form this repression takes is that of control unit prisons, or "super-maximum" prisons as they are often called. These isolation chambers are spreading like cancer throughout the country at a huge expense and the truth about them is hardly known or recognized.

We ask you to take the time to go through this newspaper. We have covered facts about crime, imprisonment, racism, and control units that contradict what is presented in the mainstream media. We hope that the following articles will lead you to question the system that calls for more prisons in the face of these facts.

CRIME AND INCARCERATION: IS THERE A LINK?

Over the past twenty years, the prison population in the United States has quadrupled. This has been an astronomical expense, and has depleted funds that might otherwise have gone to health care, education, food, and housing. As we write, the U.S. has well over 1,000,000 people locked up. In fact, the U.S. imprisonment rate is the highest in the world, surpassing eventhat of South Africa or Russia.

People in the U.S. have bought into the imprisonment "strategy" which supposedly battles crime and keeps us safe. We have paid for the "war on crime," and we have paid for the "war on drugs," all to no avail. The problem is, prisons have not reduced crime nor made us safe. The purpose of this article is to examine the relationship between crime and imprisonment in order to expose the fraudulent assertion, made over and over again, that we need more and more prisons.



Graph #1

Imprisonment

The imprisonment rate is measured by the number of people in prison for each 100,000 people in the population. In the U.S. the imprisonment rate was about 100 per 100,000 between 1925 (when the U.S. started keeping such statistics) and 1972. It varied a bit but always stayed about the same. However, since 1972, as graph #1 shows, the imprisonment rate has skyrocketed. In 1992, the latest year for which data are available, the imprisonment rate was 332. Note that this figure does not include the number of people in jail, In fact, the total incarceration rate for the U.S.A. in 1990 was a staggering 455. (Compare this figure with 46 in the Netherlands and 79 in Australia.)

What is Crime?

This is not as simple a question as it appears. For example, there is the street crime that breaks the law and that sometimes results in imprisonment. But most crime does not result in imprisonment, nor is it even a candidate for imprisonment. For example, so-called domestic violence, or the battering of women, is almost never seen as a crime — even though it is estimated that 12,000,000 women a year in the U.S. are battered by their partners. It is also not considered a crime to deny people health care, education, or housing. We make these obvious points to emphasize that whatever the relationship between crime and imprisonment, it doesn't involve most of these issues.

How is Crime Measured?

There are two main ways that crime is measured in the U.S. The first is with the Uniform Crime Report (UCR). This is computed by adding together all the crimes that are reported to the police who in turn report it to the F.B.I. who in turn publish the findings. The other measure of crime comes from the National Crime Survey (NCS). Since 1970, it was recognized that only a tiny proportion of crimes are actually reported to the police. In order to know about all crimes, it is necessary to conduct scientifically sound surveys of the population and ask people what crimes they had been victims of. This is what the NCS does.

Since the UCR and the NCS measure crimes in very different ways, they come up with very different views of crime. Before considering each, let's first look at murder since it is the easiest to measure. We believe the results will surprise you.

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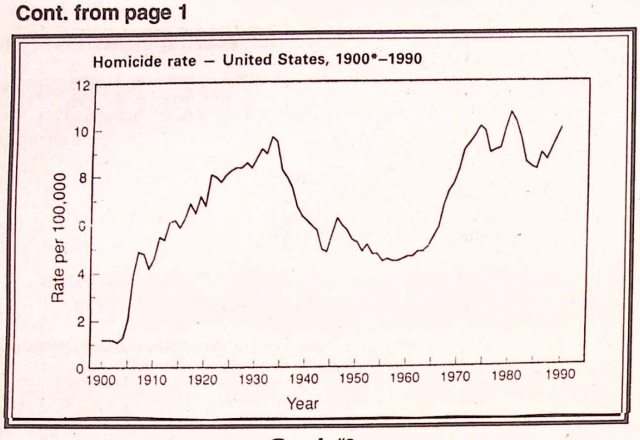


Graph #2

Murder

About 22,000 people were murdered in the U.S. last year. As graph #2 shows, the murder rate in the U.S. was about 10 (per 100,000 population) in 1930 and about 10 in 1990 — almost no change at all. This is very different than the hysterical view that we are always presented with. The results are similar for Illinois, where the rates for murder committed by Black and white people have not changed over the past decade. Are these facts consistent with the image of murder that you have in your mind?

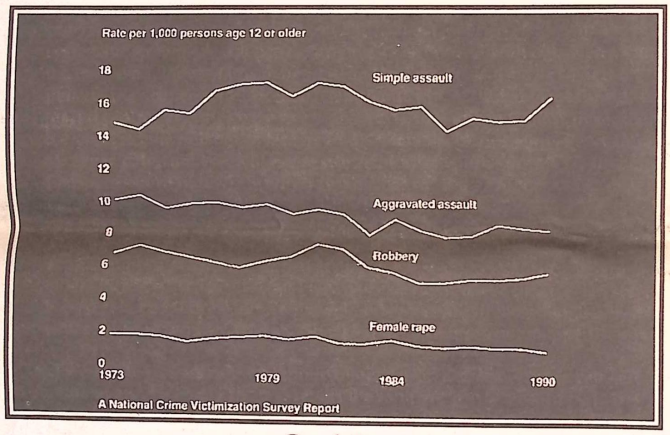
killed by family members. When viewed from this light, it is obvious that there is little that prisons could do to prevent murder. This is especially true since virtually all murder is committed in fits of passion that most experts agree are unlikely to be repeated. We are not saying that murderers should not be incarcerated. We are saying that incarceration will not prevent murders. Similarly, it has been demonstrated over and over again that the death penalty does not deter murder.

Additionally, consider the fact that there is a virtually unlimited supply of people who will commit crimes associated with drugs. As soon as one person is removed from the labor market, another replaces him or her. Prisons will never be able to dent this supply. The "War on Drugs" has no effect on deterring drug usage or selling.

Finally, consider the fact that virtually all experts agree that prisons cause people to become even more deeply embedded in a life of crime. Recidivism rates are over 50% in three years for most states. This is still one more piece of information that shows that prisons cannot prevent crime.

Has Crime Been Increasing?

Graph #3 shows crime that is measured by the NCS. As you can see, all crimes noted in the graph have remained more-or-less the same for the past 20 years — the same interval during which imprisonment has skyrocketed. Graph #4 shows crime that is measured by the UCR. Here an uneven pattern is *obvious—crime dramatically increased between 1970 and 1980 and slightly decreased between 1980 and 1990.*



Graph #3

Finances

Over the past 20 years, spending for criminal justice has increased by 600%, from about ten billion dollars to 60 billion dollars per year. That's 60 billions dollars in one year, and rapidly increasing each year.

The Relationship Between Crime and Imprisonment

When we assemble this entire picture, it must be the case that imprisonment and crime have very little to do with each other. For example, over the past 20 years one measure of crime (the NCS) has remained the same, the other measure (the UCR) has increased about 40%, the imprisonment rate has tripled, and the expense for criminal justice has increased six-fold. When all of this is put together, it is clear that putting enormous numbers of people into prison has not been able to reduce the crime rate. In fact, this is a well-known phenomenon. For example, Joan Petersilia, former president of the American Society of Criminology, in an article entitled "Building More Prison Cells Won't Make a Safer Society," notes that: "Of the approximately 34 million serious felonies in 1990, 31 million never entered the criminal justice system because they were either unreported or unsolved." Thus, she continues, only 10% of all crime ever entered the courts, about half of these resulted in convictions, and about a third of these resulted in imprisonment—virtually nothing compared to the total amount of crime.

Consider another example. Each day we read hysterical headlines about gang violence. But note this: According to police, gang violence in Chicago was responsible for about 10% of all murders in Chicago last year. In fact, almost 70% of all murders are committed by people known to the victim and almost 40% of murder victims are

What Do the Experts Say?

Consider comments by other experts on whether or not imprisonment deters crime:

**By a leading criminologist, Bernard Nagin: "[The results of this study] provide no reliable evidence that risk of imprisonment or time served has a measurable impact on the index crime rate."

**In another report: "the National Academy of Sciences, in a 1981 summary of previous penal research, concluded that 'caution should be exercised in interpreting the available evidence as establishing a deterrent effect , and especially so for the sanction of imprisonment'."

**And again, by another criminologist, Christi Visher: "Incapacitation appears to have been only slightly more effective in averting crimes in the early 1980s than in the 1970s, despite a near doubling of the U.S. prison populations in less than ten years."

**From Minnesota's Assistant Commissioner of Corrections: "There is no relationship between the incarceration rate and violent crime. We're in the business of tricking people into thinking that spending hundreds of millions [of dollars] for new prisons will make them safe."

**From the Correctional Association of New York: "The state's new policies have been staggeringly expensive, have threatened a crisis of safety and manageability in the prison system, and have failed to reduce the rate of crime or even stop its increase. After almost ten years of getting tough the citizens of New York are more likely to be victims of crime today than in 1971. Moreover, the largest rise in crime came at the end of the decade, during 1980-81, well after the introduction of more severe sentencing practices."

**The American Bar Association's Task Force on Crime has stated: "There is no solid evidence to support the conclusion that sending more convicted offenders to prison for longer periods of time deters others from committing crime."

**Even the Director of Corrections of Alabama understands this situation: "We're on a train that has to be turned around. It doesn't make any sense to pump millions and millions into corrections and have no effect on the crime rate."

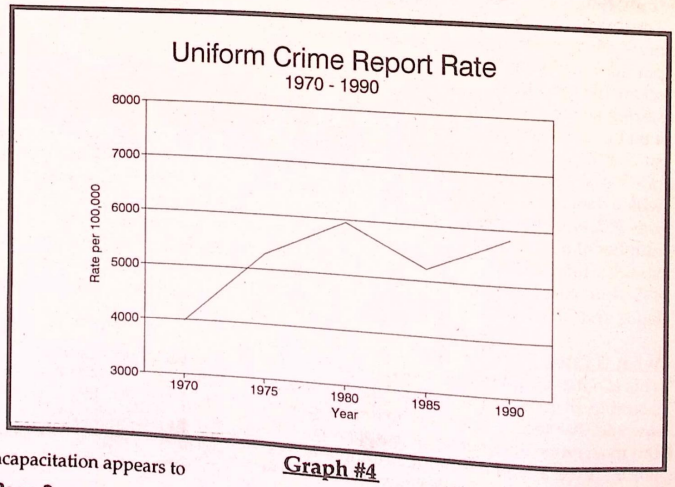
**Finally, from the Director of the Department of Corrections of Illinois: "No state has shown that locking up record amounts of people adds benefit to the society."

Conclusion

We hope that this article has demonstrated two main things. First, that the image of crime that is forced upon us by the media is distorted. Although crime is of utmost seriousness to our society, it is not what is constantly projected by television and the newspapers.

Second, imprisonment has virtually no impact on crime. Upon serious examination of the facts, this is an obvious conclusion, yet we continue to throw more and more people, most of them Black and Latino, into prison. In reality the "war on crime" and the "war on drugs" have been wars on Black and Latino people. The main purpose of these wars has not been to fight crime (since they could not succeed) but to distract us from fighting against the conditions in society which create and perpetuate crime—racism, sexism, poverty, homelessness, and despair.

Only when we come to understand these issues will we be able to begin the fight against crime; only when we begin to target the pursuit of human needs over profits will we be able to make progress in this fight.



Graph #4

THE CRIME OF BLACK IMPRISONMENT

From the Supreme Court to the police on the streets of Los Angeles, the criminal justice system brutalizes people of color in the U.S. The prison system is a central aspect of this attack. It is the ultimate form of control, locking huge numbers of people of color away, keeping them in frustrating and demoralizing conditions, and isolating them from their communities.

The U.S. incarceration rate is highest in the world, higher than in South Africa and ten times the rate in the Netherlands. The number of people in prison in the U.S. more than doubled during the eighties and is well on the way to doubling this decade. In 1981 the situation was already so bad that New York State Correction Commissioner Thomas Coughlin admitted that "the department is no longer engaged in rehabilitation and programming efforts, but is forced to warehouse people and concentrate on finding the next cell."

The figures, shocking as they are, are even more stark when analyzed in terms of race. The facts can be expressed in many ways. Black people are 12% of the U.S. population and 43% of the prison population. The national incarceration rate for Black men is about 8 times that for white men. The U.S. incarcerates Black men at a rate 5 times higher than South Africa. Using data based on a single day in mid 1989, a study by the Sentencing Project in Washington D.C. found that about one in four Black men in their twenties was under some kind of control of the criminal justice system, and about one in twelve Black men were actually behind bars. What must this mean for the Black community? Families suffer financially and emotionally. The few jobs that might have been *available to a Black man will be out of reach for an "ex-con". Moreover, prisoners rejoin their communities from prisons which do not even pretend to rehabilitate and where conditions encourage violence and criminality.*

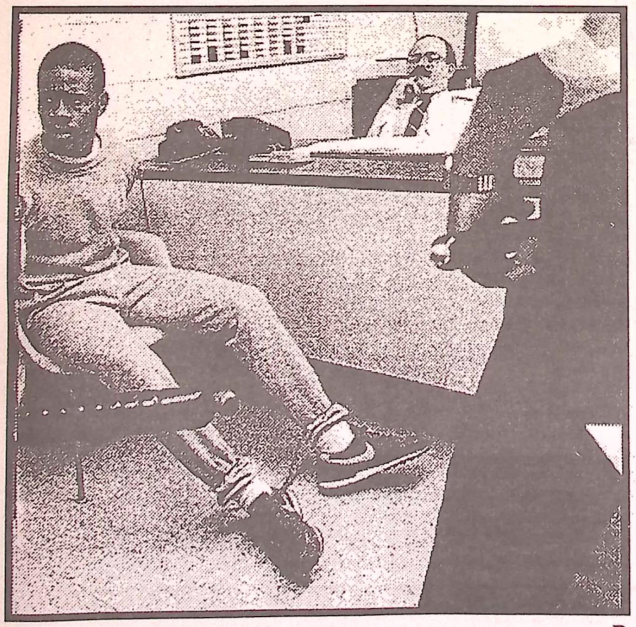
Faced with the question, "Why do Black people got to prison at a rate 8 times higher than white people?", most white people would answer that Black people commit more crime. For the sake of argument, let us assume that this is the case. One would still be compelled to ask why. The only reasonable answer would be that the palpable disadvantages that Black people suffer – poverty, unemployment and lack of decent housing, healthcare and educational opportunities– are responsible. The conclusion, then, would be that racism is the cause. However, there is actually no evidence that Black people commit more crime than white people (let alone 8 times more). The disparity in imprisonment rates could be accounted for solely from the racism of the criminal justice system. Black people are stopped, arrested, prosecuted, denied bail and sentenced at rates disproportionately higher than white people. For example, according to a study by USA Today, Black people are 4 times more likely than white people to be arrested on drug charges, even though the 2 groups use drugs at the same rate. Another example: An analysis of plea bargaining practices in almost 700,000 criminal cases conducted by the San Jose Mercury News found that "At virtually every stage of pretrial negotiation, whites are more successful than non-whites." The very *identity* of people of color is criminalized by the criminal justice system and the media. Thus, under any analysis, the reason that Black people are warehoused in prisons in such huge numbers is the same: Racism.

Crime is a problem that needs to be tackled. However, common sense compels the conclusion that better education, meaningful employment opportunities, decent housing, and adequate health care would vastly reduce the amount of crime. So why do prisons keep being built, at the expense of schools and jobs that everyone understands are a better way to prevent crime?

The reason is that the shrill voices of politicians and the media who define crime (dealing marijuana is a crime, but denying housing and healthcare to people is not) and perpetuate the racist myths that criminalize whole racial and ethnic groups are drowning out the voices of humanity. The situation grows more acute day by day - more and more people are being incarcerated, the rapid rate of the prison population increase shows no sign of dropping. People who are concerned with peace, who would like to see justice, must oppose prison incarceration increases. The reality must be exposed, fighting the racism of the prison-nightmare must be a part of every anti-racist agenda, and every human rights struggle.

MARION – THE MODEL FOR CONTROL UNITS

United States Penitentiary (USP) Marion, located in rural Southern Illinois, opened in 1963, the same year the federal prison at Alcatraz closed. It is the highest security prison in the federal system. Since it opened it has gained the reputation as the "end-of-the-line" in brutality. In 1983, the whole prison was permanently locked-down and thus turned into the first control unit. Marion has been used as the model for control units that are being built around the U.S.. In 1987, Amnesty International issued a report that concluded "there is hardly a rule in the [United Nations] Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners that is not infringed in some way or another [at USP Marion].".



The key word at Marion is *isolation*. Prisoners are kept in their cells 22 to 23 hours every day. (By comparison, in the rest of the federal prison system, prisoners spend an average of 13 hours per day in their cells.) The little time they have for "recreation" is usually spent in the narrow hallway outside their cell. This time provides little stimulation and no real opportunity for exercise. Ultimately, prisoners have minimal human contact and they are perpetually trapped, day in and day out, in their tiny cells.

The cell measures six by eight feet. Meals are taken through the bars and eaten in the cell - there is no congregate dining. Beds are concrete slabs with pads laid on top of them. The four corners of the bunk have rings so that men can be strapped down whenever prison authorities think that it is appropriate. Prisoners have reported being chained like that for days at a time.

Marion does not even pretend to rehabilitate. Prisoners may take correspondence courses, but only one at a time. The prison feeds the same educational tapes into cells via closed circuit TV again and again, and no instruction, discussion, or group classrooms exist. Moreover, there are no real religious services.

Prison officials tamper with letters and legal mail. While it is illegal for prison officials to look into prisoner's legal documents, they do so with impunity. They also frequently withhold or send back personal correspondence.

Visitation rights are severely restricted, and no contact visits are ever allowed. The men can never touch their children, partners, or other loved ones who come to visit. Prisoners must conduct conversations through Plexiglass and over the phone, which is monitored. A guard remains present, watching and recording the entire affair. Few visitors venture so far to endure such painful conditions. Prisoners often asked loved ones not to visit in order to avoid the

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humiliation that comes with this situation. As a result, one usually finds the visiting room empty. Not only are prisoner's visitors rights severely restricted, they are also allowed only two ten minute phone calls per month. Needless to say, communicating with family and friends on the outside is extremely difficult.

Despite the Plexiglass partition separating them from visitors, prisoners are strip-searched after every visit. Finger probes of the rectum may be conducted "whenever there is reasonable suspicion" that the prisoner is hiding contraband. A general idea of what constitutes "reasonable suspicion" is given by the fact that every prisoner who leaves the prison for any reason is strip searched and subjected to the "finger wave" on his return, despite being shackled and guarded the entire time. Whenever a prisoner is removed from his cell, he is shackled at hand and foot (sometimes at the waist), and escorted by two guards equipped with rib-spreader bludgeons.

Only the vaguest and most arbitrary rules exist at Marion. These guidelines all revolve around pleasing the sadistic whims of guards and wardens. The guidelines allow for disciplinary actions at Marion for trivial matters, such as failing to replace salt and pepper packets on a food tray or hanging wet clothes to dry on the bars of the cell. No rules govern graduation of prisoners to relatively less restrictive status at Marion. Prisoner promotions and demotions are "officially" at the discretion of the assistant warden. However, the power to veto any promotion effectively resides in the form of despised Incident Reports or "shots", citations for rule violations. One of the most common shots is "disobeying the direct order of a guard," which can be used by a guard to cite a prisoner any time for virtually anything. A single shot wipes out all good-conduct time a prisoner has earned and puts the prisoner back at the beginning of the "program" that ostensibly governs the progression out of Marion to a lower security prison.

The prisoners are under constant and total control of the guards. John Campbell, a prisoner at Marion, comments, "No one belongs in an environment where he is buried alive, where he's in a tomb for the dead. And the police have total control over you, and they know they have total control, and they abuse that control frequently, either on a psychological level or a physical level." Another prisoner, Steve Layton, adds, "They try to drag up the monster in you. It eats on a person, on a person's mind."

The Proliferation of Control Units

Control units have been spreading across the country at an alarming rate. More than 36 states have control unit prisons or sections of prisons that serve as control units. Many human rights groups have condemned control unit conditions. One organization, Human Rights Watch, a watchdog group, toured several U.S. prisons and reported that the "Marionization" of prisons in this country constituted the single most disturbing feature of the U.S. prison system. Not surprisingly, the prisoners in these control units are even more disproportionately Black than in the general prison population.

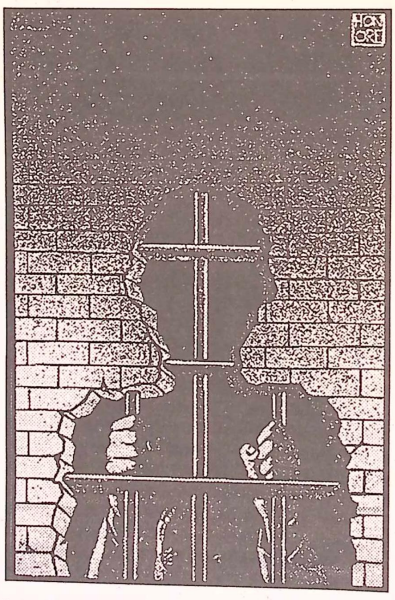
In the federal prison system, Marion is due to be replaced by a prison in Florence, Colorado. Marion was not originally built as a control unit prison. It has thus been inadequate for the task of implementing the even tighter control of prisoners which former Bureau Of Prisons (BOP) Director J. Michael Quinlan, in testimony before a Congressional Subcommittee in the fall of 1989, said would constitute an improvement upon Marion's existing regime. In the minds of prisoncrats, Marion is outdated by available new technology. Marion has, however, served its purpose as a model for proliferation of high tech control units throughout the country.

THE PROPOSED PRISON IN FLORENCE, COLORADO: A "NEW IMPROVED" MARION

First Alcatraz, Then Marion, Now Florence

In early 1990 the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) announced its decision to open a new maximum security prison in Florence, Colorado. Marion is no longer brutal enough for them. The prison in Florence will be designed so that one guard can control the movements of numerous prisoners in several cellblocks by way of electronic doors, cameras, and audio equipment. "We'll be able to electronically open a cell door, shut it behind the inmate, and move him through a series of sliding doors" says Russ Martin, project manager for the Florence prison. Each cell will have double walled doors, i.e. box car cell design, and when one cell door is open, none of the other doors will be able to be opened.

Presently, at Marion, the prisoners can scream to one another from their cells; prisoners have minimal contact with guards when their food is shoved between the bars. In Florence, this "contact" may be eliminated. "These guys will never be out of their cells, much less in the yard or anywhere around here," the Florence City Manager states. The windows are slits 3 inches wide with no view of the outside, and the exercise pens are individual with a grate covering.



The euphemism-loving public officials envision that Florence will be a "safe, secure environment." "The institutional atmosphere would be as stress-free as possible." Are the steel rings embedded in the concrete beds at Marion to which prisoners are tied spread-eagle for hours or days "stress diffusion devices?" State-of-the-art security technology and new construction of materials will ensure near complete isolation, Martin claims, "Marion learned from Alcatraz, and now we have 30 years to learn from Marion."

Ground was broken for the $150 million complex in July,1990. The giant prison complex (600 acres) in Florence, a town about 50 miles west of Colorado Springs, will consist of four different levels of security, a 750-bed medium security prison, a 550-bed high security penitentiary similar to Leavenworth, and a 550-bed "administrative maximum" security prison far worse than Marion prison. The "Administrative Maximum" is due to open in Spring 1994.

The Surrounding Environment

For years, prisoners at Marion have had to bathe in and drink toxic water from Crab Orchard Lake. In 1990 it was found that the levels of carcinogenic trihalomethanes were twice as high as the Environmental Protection Agencies maximum contamination levels. In a move mirroring the toxic water situation at Marion, the BOP picked an area in Florence that may be equally detrimental for the prisoners' health.

Just five miles from the proposed prison site, in Lincoln Park, isthe notorious Cotter Corporation, a uranium milling company owned and run by Commonwealth Edison of Chicago, Illinois. A class action lawsuit has been filed in the U.S. District Court, in Denver, by over 340 people against Cotter, Santa Fe, and others claiming diminution of land value due to radioactive contamination. The contamination is not just limited to the Cotter site. Radioactive materials were found at the Santa Fe depot near downtown Cañon City and a railroad site north of Cotter. Cotter was sued by the state of Colorado in 1983 for the extensive contamination, and they settled for $15 million and a promise by Cotter to clean up the mill site, but it does not include the railroad sites.

The presence and risks of uranium in the water, soil, and air is of immediate concern. Studies of nearby ponds show that radioactive materials have seeped into the underground water source. The second source of concern is air contamination. Cotter itself estimates that over 19.9 tons of extremely hazardous dust were released annually from the mill. Experts on radiation diseases state that the radioactive dust is the most threatening and dangerous source of contamination. Due to water contamination alone the Lincoln Park area has been on the Environmental Projection Agency's National Priorities List since 1984 and has been designated a Superfund site for contamination clean-up.

Florence Area's Political Climate

Residents in the Cañon City -Florence area seem to be overwhelmingly in favor of the new prison. They managed to raise $160,000 to purchase the 600 acres for the prison site. Although the enthusiastic attitude by many of the locals is reprehensible it is hardly a surprise since the prison will generate 1,000 temperary jobs and 750-900 permanent jobs, jobs desparately needed in this poverty stricken area. The prison will generate an annual payroll totaling $44 million. Cañon City has learned to rely on the prison industry for jobs: it is currently the home to 6 state prisons.

Conclusion

Marion is a violent attack on human rights. Florence aspires to be even worse - an outrage. It should offend the sensibilities of those whose minds have not been poisoned with the foolish, racist propaganda about "the war on drugs" and the "war on crime" which claims that prisons are the answer to society's ills. People who support the most basic of human rights must work to end the lockdown at Marion, prevent Florence from being opened and stop the proliferation of control units. Write to:

United States Attorney General Janet Reno
Department of Justice
Constitutional Avenue and 10th Street North West
Washington, D.C. 20530

Write to the Colorado Coalition to Abolish Control Unit Prisons at:
P.O. Box 1156
Boulder, CO 80306-1156,
for a subscription to their newsletter, "Shut Them Down."

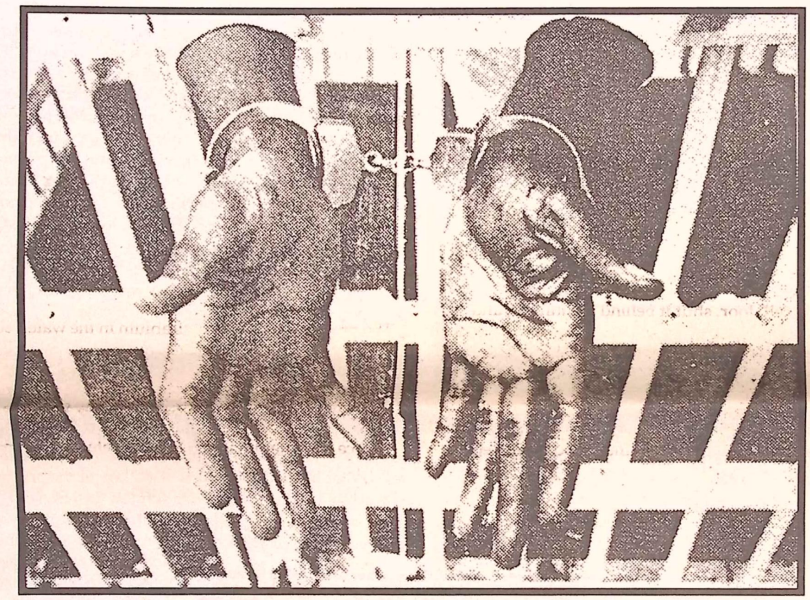
WHY CONTROL UNITS EXIST: TO SUPRESS PRISONER DISSENT

The term "control unit" was first coined at USP Marion, Illinois in 1972 and has come to designate a prison or part of a prison that operates under a "super-maximum security" regime or "lockdown conditions". Control units may differ from each other in some detail, but all share certain defining features:

1. Prisoners in a control unit are kept in solitary confinement in tiny cells (six by eight feet is usual) for between 22 and 23 hours a day. There is no congregate dining, no congregate exercise, no work opportunities, and no congregate religious services.

2. These conditions exist permanently (temporary lockdowns occur at almost every prison) and as official policy.

3. The conditions are officially justified not as punishment for prisoners but as an administrative measure. Prisoners are placed in a control unit through an *administrative* transfer, and since there are no rules governing such transfers (in contrast to *punitive* transfers), prisoners are denied due process. Prison officials can incarcerate any prisoner in a control unit for as long as they choose, without having to give any reason.



The official line on control units is that they are for uncontrollably violent prisoners and that they prevent violence in the prison system as a whole by removing the most violent prisoners from the general population. Obviously, the second claim depends on the first. Anyone who has read any newspaper articles on the subject of control units or "super-max" prisons will be familiar with the claim that they contain the most violent prisoners –a claim that the media dutifully repeats, without any question, despite the fact that it is not true.

Ironically, the proof that control units do not contain the most violent prisoners is available in government documents. In 1984, federal prisons had security ratings from 1 through 6 with 1 being the least secure and 6 being the most secure. Marion was the only level 6 prison in the federal system, and prisoners there were supposed to have a corresponding level 6 rating. However, a 1984 report by consultants hired by a U.S. Congressional oversight committee stated that 80% of prisoners at Marion did not have a level 6 rating but rather had ratings 3,4 and 5. According to the report, the prisoner profile at Marion was similar to that at all the other ordinary maximum security prisons–there was nothing especially violent about a prisoner at Marion. In fact, prisoners are sent to Marion for a variety of reasons. For example, when a U.S. district court ordered a cap on the prison population, many prisoners convicted of felonies in the District of Columbia were transferred to Marion in order to relieve overcrowding. These prisoners constituted 17% of Marion's population in 1990, and virtually all of these prisoners were Black.

The second claim, that Marion and the other control units reduce violence throughout the prison system, cannot be true since they don't contain the most violent prisoners. Moreover, the existence of control units serves to increase brutal and repressive conditions throughout the system. In Indiana, for example, a state control unit was built at Westville and opened in 1991. Shortly after its opening, 2 other Indiana prisons, at Pendleton and Michigan City, were locked down for extended periods of time and now Indiana is building a second control unit. So much for the promised reduction in violence. Finally, even assuming the claim that the "most violent and predatory prisoners" were taken out of the general population and placed in control units, the level of violence in the prison system as a whole would not be reduced. Prisons, by their very nature and design, breed violence. Thus, to isolate several hundred "violent" prisoners in a control unit necessarily cannot reduce the level of violence in a system that operates to continually encourage and increase violent behavior.

Another aspect rarely discussed by the media is that most of the prisoners in control units will be released at some stage either back into the general prison population or into society. It is known that control unit conditions produce feelings of resentment, rage, and mental deterioration. Prisoners will have been so deprived of human contact that it will be hard for them to cope in a social situation again. The inhumanity of control units cannot reduce violence, it can only increase it.

So what are control units really for? Ironically, the true purpose of control units was set forth by Ralph Arons, a former warden at Marion, who testified in federal court:

> "The purpose of the Marion Control Unit is to control revolutionary attitudes in the prison system and in the society at large." (Note "attitudes").

Prisoners have been transferred to Marion for writing "too many" lawsuits, for protesting brutality of the prison system, or for angering prison officials in some other way. In addition, political prisoners that resist against the U.S. government's oppressive practices are often sent to Marion. Among the many political prisoners who have been in Marion, several have been sent there directly from court. These include American Indian Movement leader, Leonard Peltier, member of the Black Liberation Army, Sekou Odinga, and North American political prisoners, Alan Berkman, Tim Blunk, and Ray Levasseuer. The fact that these men were sent directly to Marion from court disproves again the claim that prisoners at Marion have been violent at other prisons.

The Prison Discipline Study initiated in 1989 by the Prisoner Rights Union of Sacramento, California investigated the question of which prisoners were most often disciplined and how. The report showed that solitary confinement was the most common disciplinary action. Included in this report were testimonies by prisoners stating that personal integrity was more often singled out for brutal treatment. Respondents to the survey described this group as "those with principles or intelligence"; "those with dignity and self-respect"; "authors of truthful articles"; "motivated self-improvers"; those "verbally expressing [their] opinion", "wanting to be treated as a human being" and/or "reporting conditions to the outside." The study shows, therefore, that a practice such as sending prisoners to control units, which is based on arbitrary and subjective judgments by guards and other prison officials, will target prisoners who are most likely to be challenging the prison system.

It is admitted at the highest level that a prisoner's political beliefs are the basis for assigning that prisoner to a control unit. In a letter to Congressperson Kastenmeir, the then Chair of the Congressional subcommittee that oversees the BOP, J. Michael Quinlan, the former Director of the BOP, stated:

> "A prisoner's past or present affiliation, association, or membership in an organization which has been documented as being involved in acts of violence [or] attempts to disrupt...the government of the U.S....is a factor considered in assessing the security needs of inmate."

We may ask what constitutes "association" with an organization or what is meant by trying to "disrupt" the government. In a case brought by a prisoner in the Security Housing Unit (SHU) at the California State prison in Sacramento, Chief Justice Karlton made it clear that prisoners are sent to the SHU for reasons that have nothing to do with discipline. He noted that the plaintiff, who was challenging the prison's forbidding him to practice his Native American religion, was in the SHU for being "an associate" of a prison gang, the Mexican Mafia, and that "given that [he] is in the SHU by virtue of his status rather than as a punishment for a particular act, there is no apparent way for him to work his way out."

To emphasize yet again that control units do not contain the "worst of the worst" and that they exist to prevent dissent let us present one final example. In July 1992, 22 prisoners were transferred from USP Lewisburg, Pennsylvania to Marion. For 2 years, dating back to June 25, 1990, prisoners at Lewisburg had been protesting barbaric work conditions. The last straw in this process occurred when the prisoners were forced to make grill bars to imprison themselves, and a long strike ensued. After a settlement, prisoners tried for 2 years to institute a process wherein their grievances could be heard and discussed. The prison refused. On July 8, 1992, virtually none of the 1,400 prisoners at Lewisburg went to work. Rather than negotiate, the warden responded by transferring those he perceived as the leaders, the 22 who were then sent to Marion.

In conclusion, conditions in control units are so brutal and inhumane as to be tantamount to torture. Moreover, the reason they exist and continue to be built is in order to suppress the legitimate struggles of prisoners for their human rights.

NEW CONTROL UNIT PRISON PLANNED FOR ILLINOIS

Governor Edgar's Task Force on Crime and Corrections

In February 1992, Governor Jim Edgar created the Illinois Task Force on Crime and Corrections ostensibly to develop "creative, long range solutions to the problems of prison overcrowding." The Illinois prison system is facing an overcrowding crisis. Designed to hold 20,000 prisoners, it currently houses 31,500. The Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) projects that the prison system will contain 40,000 people by 1996, an increase of 8,500 within the next three years. One of primary duties of the Task Force was to "study alternatives to incarceration that offer cost-effective means of protecting public safety and penalizing offenders."

The Task Force reported that "building prisons is not a cost-effective solution to the overcrowding problem." The Task Force's Final Report noted that Illinois has built 15 new prisons within the last 15 years with costs surpassing $560 million in the last decade. In their Interim Report, released in June 1992, they acknowledged the fact that there is no less crime despite this massive program of incarceration, an obvious admission of the failure of prisons.

In spite of the evidence and in spite of what they themselves say in their reports, the members of the Task Force - the great majority white men who serve as prosecutors, judges, law enforcers and past and present prison officials - concluded that the solution to the problem is to build more prisons. The Task Force proposed building or opening more than 4,500 new cells, including 600 from the conversion of a school into a prison, and 500 in a new control unit or "super-maximum security" prison. A reasonable estimate of the total cost of all this to Illinois taxpayers is an extra $1.2 billion over the next ten years (on top of existing spending on corrections). These costs are shown in the following table:

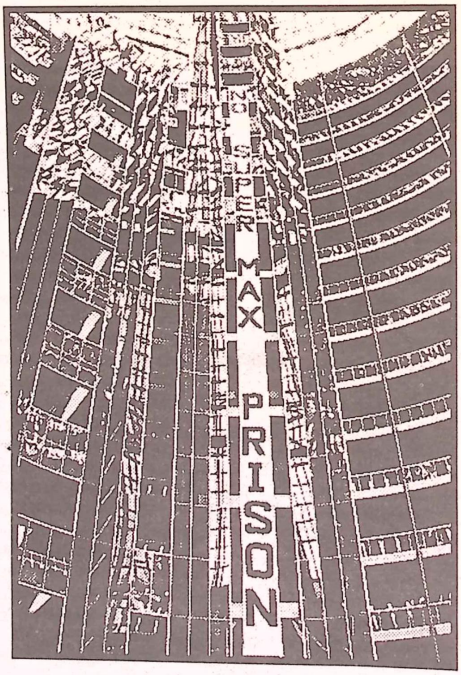
Site	Beds	Construction	One Year Cost
Big Muddy	952	47.8	19.7
E. St. Louis	600	13.0	12.0
Control Unit	500	60.0	22.0
Old Folks Prison	350	8.0	10.5
3 New Cell Houses	1,344	18.0	2.1
5 Work Camps	850	17.6	18.9
Totals	4,596	164.4 X 2	85.2

(Costs are in $ millions)

Prison construction in Illinois is paid for with bonds. Consequently, the people of Illinois have to pay interest on these bonds. According to a recent study by the American Bar Association, this effectively doubles the cost of construction as shown in the above table. Edgar and the Task Force are deliberately deceitful in not presenting the true costs of this construction.

Obviously, this massive prison construction completely defies the Task Force's mandate to find affordable solutions to crime and imprisonment. Since the Task Force recognizes the history of prison construction in the state, and does not believe more construction is the adequate solution, why did it propose to invest more Illinois taxpayers' money into producing more prison cells? How could the Task Force fail so miserably in its duties and goals?

There is clear evidence that the Task Force was not the independent panel of experts that the Governor and other state officials claimed it to be. People who attended their meetings describe how the chair, Judge Anton Valukas, along with the Governor's aide and the Director of the Department of Corrections (both non-voting members of the Task Force) drafted all of the proposals. Every proposal the Task Force has made has been endorsed by the Governor and Edgar has supported all of the Task Force's proposals. Finally, the exact recommendations made by the Task Force for the construction of the 1,344 new cells were contained in Governor Edgar's Fiscal Year 1993 budget written six months *before* the Task Force presented its Final Report to the Governor. The new cells were not included in the Task Force's Interim Report. It seems that the Task Force was a useful vehicle for the Governor to gain credibility and support for his own plans for prison construction.



Banner hung in the State of Illinois building during protest against proposed super-max prison.

The true nature of the Task Force was clearest in its handling of the most extreme proposal: the super-maximum security prison. Most of the members of the Task Force had never heard of control unit prisons. The members had no knowledge regarding the history of human rights violations and the inherent repressive function of control units, and they did not bother to educate themselves. They swallowed the official lies about control units reducing violence within prison systems without so much as a blink of dissent. Although the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown provided the Task Force with evidence that control units are inhuman, racist torture chambers, the Task Force chose to ignore this information. Valukas refused to have an open discussion or debate regarding control unit prisons, and he would not allow the few Task Force members opposed to the control unit to register or document their opposition.

The justification for the control unit is that it would solve the problem of violence in Illinois prisons. Control units are as effective in controlling violence as prisons are in preventing crime: that is to say, not at all. There have been major disturbances and massive law suits associated with such prisons. The Task Force admitted, "There has been no formal evaluation of these units." and they could provide no concrete evidence that control units reduce violence within the prison system. However, this did not stop them from recommending that Illinois create such an expensive, destructive and futile prison.

Illinois' Perpetuation of Racism

The Task Force stated that drug related and violent crimes are contributing to the increase in criminal behavior. In their Interim Report, it states that the projected increase in the prison population would result from the increase in criminal activity in "crime prone communities". The Task Force defined "crime prone communities" as Black and Latino male youth. There is no proof that there has been or will be an increase in criminal activity among these groups or, in fact, any groups. However, there has been an increase in the arrests and convictions of people of color, particularly Black and Latino men. Illinois has contributed to the U.S.'s "war on drugs", supporting "law and order crusades" which criminalize and imprison people of color. This is apparent from the fact that in Illinois a Black person is 14 times more likely to go to prison than a white person. The Task Force not only produces racist rhetoric in its official reports that condone the arrests and imprisonment of people of color, but also serves as the voice for proposing the construction of cells that will cage more people of color. The Task Force has failed in its stated goal of solving prison overcrowding, but it has succeeded in helping equip the state in its war on people of color.

This is clear from the obscene proposal to convert Assumption High School, in virtually all-Black East St. Louis, into a minimum security prison. Four million dollars has already been invested in planning this new facility, and the Task Force proposed that $13 million would be needed to make the ultimate conversion. The starting cost of the prison would be $5.9 million, and it will cost $12 million annually to operate . Obviously, the Task Force believed that investing millions of dollars in the prison system rather than the educational system will better suit the East St. Louis community. The Task Force insultingly rationalizes that this investment will serve as a public service, since prisoners can be forced to clean up the city. The Task Force, along with the U.S. government, would rather spend money imprisoning people of color than providing them with education.

The Worthlessness of the Media

Readers of this article, even those from Illinois, have probably not heard of the proposals to spend $1.2 billion on the new prisons over the next ten years from the mainstream media. Of course, the media has been fully supportive of Edgar's Task Force's proposals. The media is primarily responsible for perpetuating and supporting the hysteria around "the war on drugs" and "law and order" mentality. Edgar and the Task Force have done their best to hide the true nature of control unit prisons along with the astronomical costs of the prison construction from the public, and the media has done nothing to uncover the truth.

General Assembly

Despite the skyrocketing costs of prison construction, the Task Force's proposals were dutifully introduced and shepherded through the Illinois General Assembly. The issue became a competition between the Republicans and the Democrats to prove who was "tougher on crime". Few legislators blinked an eye at the authorization of $60 million to build the control unit prison. Instead they haggled over increasing public assistance $25 a month per student. In a state where the Chicago Public schools did not openat the beginning of this school year, where the Department of Children and Family Services are court ordered to hire more staff but cannot afford to, and where infant mortality is worse than 45 other states the only financial investments these legislators can make is toward prison construction. Obviously, they have their own political

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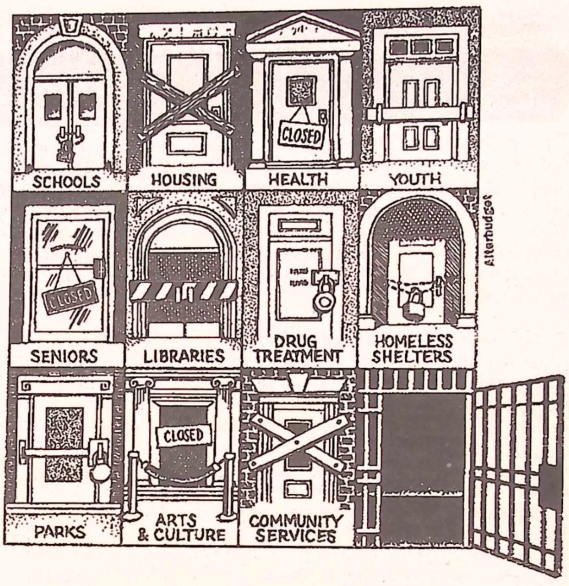
agendas in mind and not the body of people they represent.

The Formation of the Control Unit

The money to be spent on the control unit was passed in Illinois' final budget in July, and the Illinois Department of Corrections has the authorization to begin building it in early 1994. The state is now accepting bids from Illinois counties to have the prison built in their area. It will almost certainly be built in a rural, economically depressed community where the prospects of desperately needed jobs will deaden any protest or criticism. Architectural and construction firms, picked by the Governor's political cronies, will be paid substantial sums of money to design and build the control unit. Illinois taxpayers' money will now be used to build a 500 bed torture chamber that will incorporate the most advanced technology of repression and degradation. The Governor, the Chair of the Task Force, the Director of the Department of Corrections, and the General Assembly are ushering unprecedented brutality into the Illinois prison system. They must be stopped. We must fight it now.

Write the Governor
Get in contact with CEML

Gov. Jim Edgar
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706



WESTVILLE'S MAXIMUM CONTROL COMPLEX: INDIANA'S MARION

The Marion model - total physical and psychological control - has erupted and blistered into control units throughout the country. In May of 1991, what was quickly to become one of the worst control units in the country, the Maximum Control Complex in Westville, Indiana, opened and began a systematic strategy devoted to destroying those housed within its walls. But the twelve million dollar warehouse failed to sate the sadistic thirst of the Indiana Department of Corrections, which quickly instituted plans for a second control unit, twice the size of the MCC, in Sullivan County in southern Indiana. Strong, outspoken leaders from Indiana prisons such as Pendleton, Michigan City, and Westville were selected for transfer to the MCC. In the traditional spirit of the U.S. prison system, 85% of the prisoners at the MCC are Black.

Prisoners are caged in 8 by 10 foot closed door cells for 23 hours per day. Temperatures have been recorded at just above 50 degrees. Prisoners are often placed on "strip cell status" for weeks or months at a time — clad solely in boxer shorts, with bedding removed. Prisoners are firehosed in their cells with cold water while naked and shackled. The cells are not mopped.

Cell extractions - assaults by a group of guards on a prisoner in his cell - are frequent and violent. Prisoners report the rampant use of steel-tipped "rib-spreaders" and mace. Prisoners are strapped face down and naked to their concrete beds with five-way restraints for days at a time. Any time a prisoner leaves his cell, he is shackled hands, feet, and waist. The prisoner is held on a "dog chain" and is flanked by a minimum of three guards.

TVs and radios are forbidden, and pens are restricted. All of a prisoner's personal belongings (including legal materials) must fit in an 8 1/2 by 11 inch box or be forfeited. Nothing may be hung on the cell walls. There are no clocks or watches allowed, and guards are instructed to ignore a prisoner's request for the time. Books of any kind are forbidden, and only "mainstream" newspapers are allowed and may only be kept for twenty-four hours.

There are no educational programs whatsoever. Exercise at the MCC consists of a prisoner alone with a tennis ball in an enclosed area without tennis shoes. When a prisoner is transferred into the MCC, he is not allowed to have any visitors for ninety days. All later visits, including attorney visits, take place by phone in a tiny booth divided by glass, with the prisoner fully shackled. After these non-contact visits, prisoners are subject to a genital search.

Pre-arranged, pre-approved visits by both family, friends, and lawyers are frequently refused after the visitor has traveled (often at great expense) to the prison. Recently, after a two hour delay while prison officials attempted to deny a pre-approved visit by a prisoner's father, the father suffered a heart attack when his son was finally brought out, and he saw his son's deteriorated physical condition and observed his abusive treatment by MCC guards.

In response to these horrific conditions, the prisoners at Westville's MCC embarked on two of the longest and most courageous hunger strikes in U.S. prison history, the second of which lasted some fifty days. Amnesty International wrote two letters of inquiry and condemnation to the Indiana Department of Correction, citing extensive violations of the United Nations' Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. This marked the first time in history that Amnesty had moved against a state prison. On July 11, 1992, folks from Indiana and Illinois banded together to sponsor an exhilarating demonstration to protest the barbarous conditions at the MCC. Over a hundred protesters from all over Indiana and Chicago joined forces to demand that the MCC be shut down. One week after the demonstration, amidst widespread media reports of abusive conditions at the MCC, James Aiken, the Commissioner of the Indiana Department of Corrections, resigned.

The day of the demonstration, July 11, 1992, Westville Correctional Center, a lower security prison, and the maximum security prison at nearby Michigan City, Indiana were locked down. Michigan City remained on lockdown for eleven months, marking one of the longest lockdowns in US prison history. This followed another record breaking lockdown at the Indiana Reformatory in Pendleton, IN where a deadlock was imposed after a peaceful protest in support of the MCC hungerstrikers. These recent long-term lockdowns clearly expose the official lie that supermax control unit prisons contain the "worst of the worst" prisoners, allowing the rest of the state's prisons to loosen up. In fact, such prisons serve as an anchor, pulling the rest of the prison system toward more and more repressive practices.

Demonstration in Valpraiso, Indiana against the control unit in nearby Westville, Indiana.

If you oppose control unit prisons and extended lockdowns, write to the individuals below and demand that the MCC be shut down, that the control unit at the Wabash Valley Correctional Institution in Sullivan County not be opened, and that the policy of extended lockdowns be abolished immediately.

Governor Evan Bayh
200 W. Washington
State House / Room 206
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Commissioner Christian DeBruyn
302 W. Washington
Room E 334
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Attorney General Pamela Carter
200 W. Washington
State House / Room 219
Indianapolis, IN 46204

THE WAR ON DRUGS

The rapidly increasing imprisonment rate is largely due to measures taken as part of the so-called "war on drugs". In December 1992,60% of the people in Federal prisons were drug offenders. (Note that drug offenders only include those convicted of a drug offense not those convicted of a non-drug offense who have a drug history). In fact the number of drug offenders in the Federal prisons today is greater than the entire Federal prison population in 1980. Many more arrests, longer sentences and mandatory sentences for drug offenses are contributing to the record numbers of people behind bars. During the 80's the number of drug arrests increased by over 250%. Although white and Black people use drugs at roughly the same rate, according to a study by USA Today, a Black person is four times as likely to be arrested on drug charges as a white person. This figure is as large as 22 times in Minneapolis. Mandatory sentencing is a particularly brutal aspect of this war; since 1984, of those convicted, 63% were Black or Hispanic and one third of the total had no prior criminal record.

Despite the hype and the huge amounts of money spent there has been virtually no change in the rates of drug use in the U.S. over the past few years. The National Institute on Drug Abuse actually reported an increase in the number of weekly and monthly cocaine users in 1991. In addition the survey showed an increase in drug use in the Black community, the community that has been hardest hit by this war. Inside the prisons the General Accounting Office recently reported that only 20% of the more than half a million State prisoners in need of drug treatment actually receive any treatment. It is clear that the "war on drugs" has very little to do with reducing drug addiction.

Looking over the facts about this "crusade" it is clear that it is racist to the core and has no effect other than leading to deterioration of communities of people of color. Police target poor, Black and Latin neighborhoods to make "drug sweeps" and arrests even though the great majority of drug users are white. A front page story in the Los Angeles Times said that while about 80% of nation's drug users are white, the majority of those arrested for drug offenses are Black. Racism also explains why the Federal Drug Abuse Act equates selling five grams of crack cocaine, worth about $100, with 500 grams of powdered cocaine worth about $50,000, both crimes drawing mandatory prison terms of five years. Black drug users often use cheaper crack cocaine, while white drug users more often use the relatively expensive powder, which is the real profit-maker for the drug trade.

The police and the rest of the criminal justice system use the myth of the "war on drugs" to justify the abuses they mete out on people of color, from incarceration of thousands and thousands more people each year, to curfews, pass-laws and virtual lockdown conditions in some communities, to just plain murder. People concerned with justice must see it like it is: this is a war on people of color.

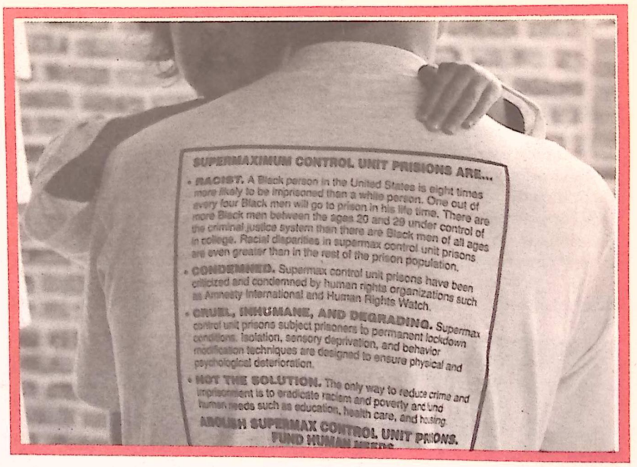
COMMITTEE TO END THE MARION LOCKDOWN

This special issue of Walkin' Steel is a production of the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown (CEML). The United States Penitentiary at Marion was opened in 1963 to replace the infamous Alcatraz prison which closed that same year. Since then, Marion has become an increasingly inhumane institution. In 1972, the year after the rebellion at Attica Prison, one wing of Marion was turned into a control unit. In 1983, the entire prison was locked down and turned into one huge control unit. CEML was founded in 1985, with three main purposes: to fight against the brutality of the prison; to work against the spread of control unit prisons throughout the U.S.; and to expose the white supremacist nature of the prison system.

In early 1990, the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) announced that the "mission of Marion" would be moved to a new prison to be constructed in Florence, Colorado. CEML decided that, despite our small size, we felt compelled to fight against the opening of this "administrative maximum" prison. Fortunately, we are but one part of a movement launched in November 1990 when people across the country responded to a call to gather and *strategize against Florence.*

The lockdown at Marion is just completing its 10th year and control units have proliferated in the state prison systems all over the country. Many organizations and individuals have done massive amounts of good work to oppose these torture chambers, but much more help is needed. If you are not yet involved in the struggle to abolish control units, there is much that you can do to help.

front


SUPERMAXIMUM CONTROL UNIT PRISONS ARE...
• RACIST. A Black person in the United States is eight times more likely to be imprisoned than a white person. One out of every four Black men will go to prison in his life time. There are more Black men between the ages 20 and 29 under control of the criminal justice system than there are Black men of all ages in college. Racial disparities in supermax control unit prisons are even greater than in the rest of the prison population.
• CONDEMNED. Supermax control unit prisons have been criticized and condemned by human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.
• CRUEL, INHUMANE, AND DEGRADING. Supermax control unit prisons subject prisoners to permanent lockdown conditions. Isolation, sensory deprivation, and behavior modification techniques are designed to ensure physical and psychological deterioration.
• NOT THE SOLUTION. The only way to reduce crime and imprisonment is to eradicate racism and poverty and unmet human needs such as education, health care, and housing.
ABOLISH SUPERMAX CONTROL UNIT PRISONS.
FUND HUMAN NEEDS.

back

HERE IT IS! This is your big chance to make a political *and* fashion statement while financially supporting the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown.

These elegant tee-shirts, shown above, come in three color schemes; white on black, black on white, and black on gray. Available sizes are medium, large, and extra large. The shirts are 100% cotton. The front of the shirt says "**NO SUPERMAX PRISON**". The back contains several facts about the racist nature of imprisonment.

So, order now. Strike a pose. Abolish all control units.

Price is $12 each, $22 for two, $30 for three. Add $3 for postage per order.

Send orders to: CEML; P.O. Box 578172; Chicago, IL 60657-8172

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

	Color scheme	size
shirt 1		
shirt 2		
shirt 3		

Total amount enclosed $_____